



COMPLETE GABON – PARTS I & II

DATES: 30 AUGUST – 17 SEPTEMBER 2020



*We hope to find the splendid **White-crested Tiger Heron** on this Gabon tour.*

Gabon is a relatively undiscovered gem which hosts a great many difficult African bird species. This French-speaking country is located in Equatorial West Africa and complements our “bulge of Africa” tours much further to the north-west (Ghana being the usual destination we run in that part of the world). While Gabon has no endemic birds, there are several tantalizing species such as **African River Martin**, **White-crested Tiger-Heron**, **Rosy Bee-eater**, **Vermiculated Fishing Owl** and various other Congo-basin species, that are arguably more easily found here than anywhere else. The bizarre **Grey-necked Rockfowl** is another highly prized species possible on our route (although this species is perhaps best sought on our Cameroon tour).

Almost 70% of Gabon is still covered by pristine, primeval lowland rainforest, which is part of the appeal, and with a population of just 1.5 million people, these forests remain relatively untouched. The country also has a wide range of other habitats, not only tropical rainforest, but also coastal lagoons, pristine beaches, large rivers and associated riverine vegetation, montane-type grasslands, and broken miombo-woodland, all of which are home to a wide variety of spectacular birds. Gabon also boasts spectacular animals such as **African Forest Elephant**, the spectacular **Red River Hog**, three species of **Crocodile**, several marine **turtles**, **Chimpanzee**, **Western Gorilla**, **Mandrill** and other amazing primates.

Our well-designed, comprehensive Gabon tour is divided into two parts, visiting all of the key birding sites, and targets all of the country's many specials. The first leg takes place in the coastal wetlands, rivers and surrounding forests of the greater Loango National Park, where we seek out the country's more well-known specials, such as **African River Martin** and **White-crested Tiger Heron**, amongst others. The second, longer leg, sees us head inland to visit some of the country's many national parks, along with exploring some of the more remote eastern regions of the country. Here our focus shifts to more lowland forest based birding, along with exploring some of the grasslands and associated woodland environs. Among the many possible species, we hope to find such prized species as **Grey-necked Rockfowl**, along with **Dja River Scrub Warbler**, **Congo Serpent Eagle** and **Congo Moor Chat**, amongst many other Congo-basin species, more easily sought here than elsewhere in their range.

Full Itinerary (19 days/18 nights)

Part I (7 days/6 nights)

Part II (13 days/12 nights)

Part I

Day 1. Arrival in Libreville.

Today is your arrival day, and following your afternoon arrival into the Gabonese capital, Libreville, you will be transferred to a hotel, where the tour will begin with a group dinner. Overnight: Libreville.

Day 2. Transfer from Libreville to Omboué.

Today we set off early, traveling south via a flight to Port Gentil, and onwards to Omboué, where we will stay for three nights. Once we arrive at our hotel on the shores of the Nkomi Lagoon we will explore the hotel's gardens, where we may see **Slender-billed Weaver**, **Blue-headed Coucal**, and **Green-backed Woodpecker**. Time permitting, we can take a boat trip out to Fernan Vaz

Lagoon, where we may see **Cassin's Flycatcher** and if we're lucky, the sought-after **White-crested Tiger Heron**. Here we will also get acquainted with some of the more common and widespread species of the area, and we will be on the lookout for **Great Egret, Woolly-necked Stork, Palm-nut Vulture, African Skimmer, Little Tern, Grey and Rock Pratincoles, White-fronted Plover, Water Thick-knee, Giant and Pied Kingfishers, Ethiopian Swallow, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Rufous-vented Paradise Flycatcher, Swamp Boubou and African Pied Wagtail**.

Overnight: Omboué.

Days 3 - 4. Birding Loango National Park.

We will spend our two full days in the area birding in Loango National Park, where we will explore the labyrinth of water channels, swamps, open grassy zones and riverine forest by vehicle and boat. The birding is bound to be exciting, and some of the main species we will try for are **African River Martin**, our first **Rosy Bee-eaters**, the highly prized **White-crested Tiger Heron**, rarely seen **Vermiculated Fishing Owl**, along with its equally impressive cousin, **Pel's Fishing Owl**, scarce **White-bellied Kingfisher** and **Loango Weaver**. Other possible species to be found include **White-backed Night Heron, African Finfoot, Royal and Damara Terns, White-crowned Lapwing, Forbes's Plover, African Crake, Yellow-billed Turaco, Senegal Coucal, Shining-blue Kingfisher, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Yellow-throated Tinkerbird, Black-casqued Hornbill, Yellow-billed Oxpecker** (often on the mammals), **Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat, Grey-rumped Swallow and Long-legged Pipit**. Aside from the many birds we'll be seeing, the park is also famous for the other wildlife, including **African Forest Elephant, African (Forest) Buffalo** (the smallest subspecies of African Buffalo), **Red River Hog, Slender-snouted Crocodile** and even **Leopard**. We may perhaps see the **Elephants** strolling along the beaches of the park and playing in the surf, alongside **Forbes's Plover and Western Reef Heron**.

Overnight: Omboué.

Day 5. Transfer from Omboué to Tsam Tsam.

We will leave the hotel early this morning, luggage and all, for an unforgettable journey by boat from Omboué to Tsam Tsam, our next overnight stop. Birds and scenery along the way will be breathtaking! Tsam Tsam is an ecotourism site run by the non-profit organization OELO (Organisation Ecotouristique du Lac Oguemoué), and the accommodation will see us staying in cabins on stilts in the rainforest, overlooking the Ogooué River. This will be quite a long transfer, and we will arrive in the afternoon and settle in. Flocks of **Grey Parrots** and **Piping Hornbills** will be a common sight. Once settled into the camp we may take a boat ride to some nearby quiet ponds – these ponds are host to small flocks of the brilliant **Hartlaub's Duck**, with **Black and Cassin's Spinetails** frequenting the skies above. In the evening, weather permitting, we will take a night boat trip looking for **Vermiculated and Pel's Fishing Owls**, and **White-backed Night Heron** among other nocturnal species that we may have missed in Loango National Park.

Overnight: Tsam Tsam.

Days 6. Transfer from Tsam Tsam to Lambaréné.

With our overnight stop, only a short boat transfer away in the nearby town of Lambaréné, we have most of the day available to explore the area around Tsam Tsam. This will likely see us exploring the forest patches, and grassy clearings surrounding the site. Among the many birds we will watch out for in the area are roosting **Bates's Nightjar, Shining-blue Kingfisher, Red-**

rumped Tinkerbird, Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher, White-browed Forest Flycatcher, Fire-crested Alethe, Pectoral-patch Cisticola, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Velvet-mantled Drongo, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Long-legged Pipit, Quailfinch, alongside the scarce **Violet-tailed Sunbird** and **Cassin's Malimbe**. We may even hear or see **Western Gorillas**.

In the afternoon, we will transfer up to Lambaréné by boat, enjoying some more excellent birding en-route. On reaching Lambaréné we will stay at a guesthouse near the Albert Schweitzer Hospital. The Albert Schweitzer Hospital was established in 1913 by Albert Schweitzer. Its Medical Research Unit is one of the leading scientific institutions in Africa and a highly regarded training site for African physicians. There is also good birding to be had there in the grounds, with **Grey-headed Nigrita** and **Black-winged Oriole** regular.

Overnight: Lambaréné.

Day 7(1). Departure, or continuation with Part II.

Today is the last day of Part I of our comprehensive Gabon trip, and should you only be joining for Part I, we will spend a bit of time around Lambaréné, before departing for the capital, Libreville, where the tour will conclude in the afternoon at the airport. Some of the birds possible around Lambaréné are **Goliath Heron, African Harrier-Hawk, Lizard Buzzard, Tambourine Dove, Yellow-throated Tinkerbird, African River Martin** (if we're lucky!), **Square-tailed Saw-wing, Golden Greenbul, Fraser's Rufous Thrush, Shining Drongo** and **Yellow-mantled Weaver**.

However, should you be joining Part II of the tour, we will follow the same morning plan as above, except instead of transferring back to Libreville, we will transfer to Lopé National Park.

Part II

Day 1(7). Transfer from Libreville/ Lambaréné to Lopé National Park.

Should you only be joining Part II of the tour, you will depart Libreville early in the day (please ensure you arrive the previous day), and head for Lopé National Park, where we will spend three nights. This is a long transfer, and we will arrive in the late afternoon.

However, should you only be joining Part I of this tour, we will spend the morning birding around Lambaréné, before we transfer to Lopé National Park, where we will arrive in the afternoon. Some of the birds possible around Lambaréné before we set off are **Goliath Heron, African Harrier-Hawk, Lizard Buzzard, Tambourine Dove, Yellow-throated Tinkerbird, African River Martin** (if we're lucky!), **Square-tailed Saw-wing, Golden Greenbul, Fraser's Rufous Thrush, Shining Drongo** and **Yellow-mantled Weaver**.

Overnight: Lopé National Park.

Days 2 – 3. Birding Lopé National Park.

We have two full days to explore Lopé National Park, which is one of the biggest national parks in Gabon offering a mix of rivers, bush savanna, open plains, and forest. Given the size of the reserve we will only be able to cover a fraction of it, however, we will access some of the most exciting areas in the reserve. In the open areas we will try for species such as **Senegal Lapwing, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Compact Weaver** and **Red-headed Quelea**, while arguably our

biggest target will be the localized **Dja River Scrub Warbler**. The forest and forest edges will see us seeking out **Long-tailed Hawk**, **Red-chested Owlet**, **Lyre-tailed Honeyguide** and the superb **White-crested Hornbill**, amongst other more common species, while the rivers will see a similar suite of species that we are like to have had on Part I, including **White-crowned Lapwing**, **African Skimmer** and **Rock Pratincole**. **Bat Hawks** are also regular over the rivers in the evenings. We will also be sure to keep an eye to the sky for the sought-after **Bates's Swift**. The scarce **Grey-necked Rockfowl** occurs in the area, however, is rare and difficult, and perhaps more easily sought on our Cameroon tour. Despite this, a concerted effort will be made to see this unique species. Among the many birds present here, we will watch out for **Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill**, **Speckled Tinkerbird**, **African Shrike-flycatcher**, **Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher**, **Brown-throated Wattle-eye**, **Western Black-headed Batis**, **Red-eyed Puffback**, **Fiery-breasted Bushshrike**, **Lowland Akalat**, **Yellow-lored Bristlebill**, **Chattering and Croaking Cisticolas**, **Lemon-bellied Crombec**, **Fraser's Forest Flycatcher**, **Grey Tit-Flycatcher**, **Vieillot's Black** and **Dark-backed Weavers**, **Splendid Starling**, **Superb** and **Reichenbach's Sunbirds** and **Quailfinch**. Not only is Lopé home to many bird species but also to populations of **African Forest Elephant** and **African (Forest) Buffalo**, along with a wide variety of primates, including **Putty-nosed**, **Crowned**, and **Moustached Monkeys**, **Grey-cheeked Mangabey**, and **Black Colobus** – we might, with much luck, even see **Mandrill**. There is a large population of **Western Gorillas** occurring in the reserve, however we will need some luck to come across them.
Overnight: Lopé National Park.

Day 4. Transfer from Lopé National Park to Lekoni.

We will depart the fantastic Lopé National Park, bound for Lekoni, a small 'town' in the south-eastern parts of Gabon, where we will spend three nights in our rather basic accommodation (sadly, this is the only accommodation possible in the area). This is a long transfer, and will see us departing in the morning, and arriving only in the late afternoon.
Overnight: Lekoni.

Days 5 – 6 Birding Lekoni and surrounds.

The area around Lekoni is rather unique in equatorial Africa – comprising of most notably the higher-lying grasslands of the Bateke Plateau – a habitat zone that seems very much out of place here. Naturally, this somewhat isolated habitat hosts many unique bird species, not found elsewhere in Gabon, and more characteristic of further south in Africa – such as parts of Angola and Zambia. Besides these montane-type grasslands, there are also small tracts of somewhat stunted miombo woodland along with patches of montane forest, creating a fantastic birding environment! Arguably the most prized bird of the grassland zone is the sought-after **Congo Moor Chat**, which is relatively common and normally fairly conspicuous. However, not to be outdone are other sought-after species such as **Finsch's Francolin**, **Black-rumped Buttonquail**, the curious local form of **White-bellied Bustard**, **Flappet** and the unique local form of **Rufous-naped Lark**, the prized **Black-collared Bulbul**, **Fawn-breasted Waxbill** and **Short-tailed Pipit**. Where the grasslands give way to the miombo-type woodlands, we will focus on other species such as the prized **Black-headed Bee-eater**, **Black-backed Barbet**, **Black Scimitarbill**, **Gorgeous Bushshrike**, **Red-capped Crombec**, **Yellow-bellied Hyliota**, **Tinkling Cisticola**, **Green-capped** and **Salvadori's Eremomelas**, **White-winged Black Tit**, **Souza's Shrike**, **Western Violet-backed Sunbird**, **Wood Pipit**, **Cabanis's Bunting** and the rare and localised **Black-chinned Weaver**. We will also be sure to visit a few of the montane forest patches present in the area, and

here we will search for species such as **African Broadbill**, **Black Bee-eater**, **Blue-throated Roller**, **Angolan Batis**, **Bocage's Bushshrike** and **Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat**, amongst many others.

Overnight: Lekoni.

Day 7. Transfer from Lekoni to Okondja.

Following on from the Lekoni area, our next major birding destination is the impressive forests of the Ipassa Nature Reserve/Ivindo National Park, and to break the long drive getting there from Lekoni, we will transfer to Okondja, which is roughly half the distance. Despite this, there will still be a long transfer due to the slow-going roads. This will allow us some time in the morning for birding the Lekoni area, for any species we may have missed, before having to set off. The sought-after **Red-throated Cliff Swallow** breeds under some of the culverts on the route, and will be one of our main targets. We anticipate arriving in the late afternoon.

Overnight: Okondja.

Day 8. Transfer from Okondja to Makokou, and Ipassa Nature Reserve.

We will depart our overnight stop at Okondja early in the morning, to allow us to arrive in Makokou with most of the afternoon still available, from where we will immediately set off for the Ipassa Nature Reserve, where we will spend the remainder of the day. This vast area hosts some of the country's finest lowland forests; considered the best lowland forest birding in the country. We will spend four nights in the area, giving us three full days to explore the surrounds and find as many species as possible. A huge diversity of species occur here; see the following days (9 -11) accounts below for a list of the possible species.

Overnight: Makokou

Days 9 - 11. Ipassa Nature Reserve, Ivindo National Park and surrounds.

Most of our birding will be done on foot, as we explore and venture down some of the paths cut into the forest, investigating calling birds and bouts of activity. Naturally, forest birding can be difficult going, and this area is certainly no exception, however, with patience and a bit of luck, we should enjoy a number of the area's many specials. The canopy and upper levels of the forest play host to some of the larger, and arguably more vocal species, and we will search for the massive **Great Blue Turaco**, along with its more 'normal'-sized cousins, **Yellow-billed** and **Guinea Turacos**. A plethora of **hornbills** occur here, including sought-after **White-thighed**, **Black-casqued**, **Red-billed Dwarf**, **Black Dwarf** and **White-crested**, while **Piping** and **African Pied** are usually more common. **Chocolate-backed Kingfishers** call from the upper reaches of the massive trees, yet remain as difficult to see as ever. **Barbets** are also well represented, and the area hosts **Hairy-breasted**, **Grey-throated**, **Yellow-billed** and **Yellow-spotted**, along with a number of **tinkerbirds** such as **Yellow-throated** and **Red-rumped**. The deep calls of **Afep** and **Western Bronze-naped Pigeons** ring out the throughout the forest, and it normally takes some effort to track these birds down. A number of **cuckoos** are also present, and our main targets will feature the sought-after **Yellow-throated** along with **Dusky Long-tailed** and **Olive Long-tailed**, while more widespread species include **African Emerald**, **Black** and **Red-chested**. Not to be forgotten, a number of **woodpecker** species occur here, and species such as **Yellow-crested**, **Brown-eared**, **Buff-spotted**, **Gabon** and **Green-backed** all feature. Many passerines also frequent the higher reaches and we'll be keeping an eye out for **Red-eyed Puffback**, **Western Oriole**, **Purple-throated Cuckooshrike**, **Green Hylia**, tiny **Rufous-crowned Eremomelas**, **Fraser's Rufous**

Thrush, Dusky Tit, Fraser's and Little Green Sunbirds and all of the worlds Nigrita's - Grey-headed, Pale-fronted, Chestnut-breasted and White-breasted.

Species that prefer the mid-strata and vine tangles coming down from the canopy include the sought-after **Bare-cheeked Trogon**, secretive **Rufous-sided Broadbill**, **African Dwarf** and **Blue-breasted Kingfishers**, **Blue Malkoha**, **Fraser's Forest**, **Yellow-footed** and **Chestnut-capped Flycatchers**, **Bates's Paradise Flycatcher**, **Gabon Batis**, **Yellow-bellied** and **White-spotted Wattle-eyes**, **Western** and **Yellow-throated Nicator**, **Yellow-browed Camaroptera**, **Grey Longbill**, the sought-after **Goslings Apalis**, **Maxwell's Black Weaver**, and **Crested**, **Blue-billed**, **Red-bellied** and **Cassin's Malimb**. We will need to be quite fortunate, however, to come across the poorly-known **Spot-breasted Ibis**, rare **Black-collared Lovebird**, sought-after **African Piculet**, and stunning **Rufous-bellied Helmetshrike**, along with the likes of **Fernando Po Batis**, **Black-necked Wattle-eye**, **Blue Cuckooshrike**, **Forest Penduline Tit**, **Violet-backed Hyliota**, **Yellow-capped Weaver** and both **Rachel's** and **Red-crowned Malimb**'s, but all are distinctly possible.

We will also be able to hone our 'bulbul' skills immensely here, with a vast number of different species occurring within the forest, including sought species such as **Sjöstedt's**, **Anson's**, **Yellow-whiskered**, **Falkenstein's**, **Honeyguide**, **Golden**, **Spotted**, **Eastern Bearded** and **White-bearded Greenbuls**, while other possible species include **Swamp Palm Bulbul**, **Little**, **Slender-billed**, **Little Grey**, **Plain**, **Simple**, **Icterine**, **Xavier's** and **Red-tailed Greenbuls** along with **Red-tailed Bristlebill**. Tangles, thickets and bushy growth in the lower strata down to the ground plays host to shy species such as **Black Guinea fowl**, **White-spotted Flufftail**, **Blue-headed Wood Dove**, the beautiful **Forest Robin**, **Brown-chested** and **Fire-crested Alethes**, **Brown Illadopsis**, **Lowland Sooty Boubou**, **Olive-green Camaroptera**, **Banded Prinia**, and both **Red-tailed** and **White-tailed Ant Thrushes**. Some of the more open areas of the forest, clearings in the forests, and forest edge zones will be searched for further species such as **Scaly Francolin**, **Grey** and **Red-fronted Parrots**, **Gabon Coucal**, the tiny **Tit Hylia**, **Mackinnon's Shrike**, **Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher**, **White-chinned Prinia**, **Dusky-blue Flycatcher** and the secretive **Woodhouse's Antpecker**, while we'll be sure to keep an eye out for raptors such as **Cassin's Hawk-Eagle**, **Congo Serpent Eagle**, **Long-tailed Hawk**, **Red-thighed Sparrowhawk** and **Red-chested Goshawk**. These are also great areas to scan the skies for aerial feeders, and we will be on the lookout for **Mottled**, **Cassin's** and **Sabine's Spinetails**, the scarce **Forest Swallow**, along with **Square-tailed Saw-wing**. Flowering trees in these zones, as well as in the forest proper, play host to large numbers of **sunbirds**, featuring **Tiny**, **Carmelite**, **Grey-chinned**, **Collared**, **Blue-throated Brown**, **Olive-bellied** and **Superb**.

The grassy verges to the roads and tracks in the area host a variety of colourful seedeaters, amongst them **Black-bellied Seedcracker**, **Western Bluebill**, **Black-headed** and **Orange-cheeked Waxbills** and **Black-and-white Mannikin**. While here, we will also try our luck for some of the prized nocturnal birds occurring here, which might include the localised **Sjöstedt's Barred Owlet**, **Akun** and **Fraser's Eagle-Owls**, as well as another chance for **Bates's** along with **Brown Nightjars**.

Overnight: Makokou

Day 12. Transfer from Ipassa Nature Reserve/Makokou to Ndjole.

After a great few days exploring the impressive forests of the Ipassa/Ivindo area around Makokou, our tour draws to a close, as we begin the trip back to the capital, Libreville. From Makokou, this is an incredibly long transfer, and we break the drive into two days, staying tonight at Ndjole. This allows us to fit in a bit more birding, firstly in the morning around Makokou, and then along the route, searching for any species we may still have yet to see. The journey today will see us still within excellent stands of primary forest and many of the above-mentioned species will be possible. The river frontage around Ndjole occasionally plays host to **African River Martin**, along with **Grey Pratincole**. While, we do break the drive, this transfer is still a long one, and will see us arriving in Ndjole in the late afternoon.

Overnight: Ndjole.

Day 13. Transfer from Ndjole to Libreville, and departure.

Today is the last day of the tour, and will see us heading back to Libreville, where we anticipate arriving in the midday/early afternoon period, where the tour will conclude at the airport.

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides, and other factors.

Gabon is notoriously expensive, and from time to time we have to make quite major changes (but without adversely affecting the birding targets), to keep the prices in check to some extent.

Part I

Duration: 7 days
Limit: 6 – 8
Date: 30 August – 5 September 2020
Start: Libreville
End: Libreville
Price: €6110 per person sharing
Single supplement: €1025

Part II

Duration: 13 days
Limit: 6 – 8
Date: 5 – 17 September 2020
Start: Libreville
End: Libreville
Price: €6750 per person sharing
Single supplement: €810

Price includes:

Meals

Accommodation
Guiding fees
Entrance fees
All transport while on tour
Tolls

Price excludes:

All flights
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts
Alcoholic drinks
Personal insurance
Gratuities
Visas